SPORT

PERTH: Switzerland's Stan Wawrinka serves against Arthur Rinderknech of France during their singles match of the United Cup on Saturday.—AFP

Gauff saves US, Wawrinka starts farewell season with victory

PERTH: Coco Gauff rode to the rescue with a 6-1, 6-1 hammering of Solana Sierra to nudge the United States towards a 2-1 defeat of Argentina on Saturday at the United Cup.

The defending champions trailed 0-1 after Sebastian Baez had earlier shocked sixth-ranked Taylor Fritz 4-6, 7-5, 6-4, despite the American firing down 23 aces.

Fritz suffered a minor ankle roll late in the match which put him off his power-hitting game and he was unable to close the gap on Baez, who beat the 28-year-old for the first time in six meetings.

Gauff and Christian Harrison eventually clinched the tie in the mixed doubles decider, defeating Maria Lourdes Carle and Guido Andreozzi 6-4, 6-1.

Stan Wawrinka launched the final season of his career with a marathon 5-7, 7-6 (7/5), 7-6 (7/5) win over Arthur Rinderknech to give Switzerland an unassailable 2-0 lead over France.

The 40-year-old joined team-mate Belinda Bencic as a winner after she began the tie 6-2, 6-4 over Leolia Jeanjean. The Swiss won the mixed doubles for a 3-0 final scoreline.

Wawrinka is competing in Perth for the first time, needing to battle for nearly three-and-a-half hours to defeat an opponent a decade his junior.

The three-time Grand Slam champion sealed victory on his first match point.

Also on Saturday, in Sydney, Zhang Zhizhen led China to a 2-1 win over Belgium to begin their tournament.

Norway's Casper Ruud stunned Australian number one Alex de Minaur 6-3, 6-3, while Aussie women's singles substitute Storm Hunter beat Malene Helgo 6-2, 7-6 (7/3) when illness stopped first choice Maya Joint.

Hunter and John-Patrick Smith won the doubles over Ulrikke Eikeri and Viktor Durasovic 4-6, 6-1, 10-4 for Australia's 2-1 final scoreline.—AFP

Leao fires AC Milan top of Serie A

MILAN: Rafael Leao fired AC Milan top of Serie A with a tight 1-0 win at Cagliari on Friday.

Adrien Rabiot set up Leao who fired past Elia Caprile after 50 minutes in Sardinia.

Milan move two points ahead of Inter Milan who host Bologna on Sunday with third-placed Napoli at Lazio.

The visitors came out fighting after the break, Ruben Loftus-Cheek heading over before Leao, who had arrived in Cagliari nursing a right adductor problem, breaking the deadlock having hit the crossbar minutes earlier.

Christian Pulisic missed the chance for a second with four minutes remaining but the visitors secured all three points to maintain their unbeaten run on the road this season.

Cagliari remain 14th in the standings on 18 points.—AFP

CAGLIARI: AC Milan's Rafael Leao shoots to score against Cagliari during their Serie A match at Unipol Domus.—AFP

Zverev admits 'a lot of catching up' to reel in Alcaraz, Sinner

SYDNEY: World number three Alexander Zverev admitted on Saturday that he has "a lot of catching up to do" to challenge Carlos Alcaraz and Jannik Sinner.

The 28-year-old German finished the 2025 season with only one title, in Munich, having been beset by injuries.

He still did enough to bag the number three ranking behind Spain's Alcaraz and Italian Sinner, although he trails the dominant pair by more than 6,000 ranking points.

"Of course, number one and two are quite far ahead, which was not the case at the end of 2024, when I finished number two in the world [behind Sinner]," Zverev said in Sydney, where he is playing the United Cup.

"I feel like I have a lot of catching up to do, but so does the rest of the tour." While Zverev made the final of the season-opening Australian Open last year, losing to Sinner, he disappointed at the other three Grand Slams and also at the year-end ATP Finals.

Despite this he considers 2025 as a step forward, all things considering.

"I had issues with my body, I had injuries throughout the entire season. So for me, finishing three in the world, I feel like looking back at it, it's still something to be proud of," he said.

"Of course it wasn't the season that I wanted to have," he added. "There weren't the titles that I wanted to have, the big titles especially."

Along with his physical problems, Zverev also struggled with his mental health, taking a one-month break after losing in the first round at Wimbledon. "I took some vacation, spent time with my friends, then went back to training. Changed the scenario a little bit," he said.—AFP

Abdullah, Aqib excel as President's Trophy second round begins

By Our Sports Reporter

KARACHI: Abdullah Fazal's resolute century for the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) and a five-wicket haul by Wapda pacer Aqib Khan were the standout performances on the opening day of the second round of the President's Trophy, which began across four venues in Karachi on Saturday. All four teams winning the toss opted to field first.

At the NBP Sports Complex, Abdullah struck a determined 113 off 176 balls, hitting 15 fours, to anchor SBP's innings against Ghani Glass. He was the lone batter to offer resistance as SBP were bowled out for 202 in 58 overs, with no other batter crossing 21.

The right-hander walked in during the second over and was dismissed in the 57th with the score at 195-9, registering his third first-class century. Ghani Glass's pace attack shared the spoils, with Afaq Afridi claiming 4-85, Ubaid Shah 3-45 and Mir Hamza 2-24.

In reply, Ghani Glass stumbled to 31-4 in 20 overs, undone by Mohammad Abbas's probing spell of 2-8. Kashif Ali picked up the other wicket. Ali Razzaq retired hurt after scoring six, while Tayyab Tahir was unbeaten on 19 at stumps.

At the State Bank Stadium, Aqib spearheaded Wapda's bowling effort with figures of 5-39 from 21 overs as Sui Northern Gas Pipelines Limited (SNGPL) were dismissed for 147 in 60.3 overs. It was Aqib's fourth five-wicket haul in first-class cricket.

Naqeebullah and Mohammad Adil provided support with two wickets apiece. SNGPL, reduced to 35-3, were briefly steadied by Omair Bin Yousuf (45) and Saad Khan (21), but lost seven wickets for 75 runs thereafter. Bilawal Bhatti contributed 19 lower down the order.

Wapda finished the day on 63-1, with Imran Dogar (33 not out) and Mohammad Ammar (24 not out) adding 55 runs after the early loss of Muhammad Akhlaq.

Khan Research Laboratories (KRL) were dismissed for 204 in 54.2 overs against Sahir Associates at the National Bank Stadium. Saad Baig top-scored with a fluent 64, while Hamza Nazar was run out for 46. Mohammad Mohsin Khan, Bilawal and Mohammad Hasnain claimed two wickets each.

Sahir Associates closed the day on 46-4, trailing by 158 runs, after Arshad Iqbal's incisive spell of 3-15 kept them under pressure.

Meanwhile, at the UBL Sports Complex, Pakistan Television (PTV) were bowled out for 199 in 57.1 overs against the Oil and Gas Development Company Limited (OGDCL). Mohammad Taha scored 63 after PTV slipped to 22-3 while Arafat Minhas (33) and Musa Khan (20) made useful contributions.

OGDCL's bowlers were led by Mohammad Umar (4-54) and Mohammad Imran (3-55).

In reply, OGDCL reached 73-1 at stumps, with Israrullah unbeaten on 47 following a 62-run opening stand with Sameer Saqib.

Nine races to feature in first LRC meeting of 2026

LAHORE: Two cup events for thoroughbreds featuring in a nine-race card will be the main attraction for equine sport fans when the first meeting of 2026 is held here at the Racecourse on Sunday.

The Makhdumzada Syed Hassan Mahmud Memorial New Year Cup, a term race carrying an attractive prize money of Rs2.6 million for three-year-old colts and fillies to be run over 1400 metres, contains five runners.

The field includes Coach House Candy, Inteha, Pretty Girl, Farrier Star and King Lady. This will be the sixth event in the racing order.

Earlier, The Metropolitan Fillies TRIAL Cup to be run over 1400 metres, will be held.

The term race for four-year-old fillies, will feature seven runners: Distant Music, Moni Queen, Moshi Queen, Nisha, Princess Noor, Qismat and Ronaq.

The first race of the day is set to be held at 11:30am.—Aftab Gilani

Van Aert undergoes surgery

BRUSSELS: Two-time Olympic medallist Wout van Aert has undergone successful surgery on Saturday, a day after spraining his ankle and sustaining a fracture in a crash, his team Visma-Lease a Bike said.

The Belgian, who won silver at the Tokyo Olympics in the road race and took bronze in the time trial at the Paris Games, had crashed on a paved curve during a cyclo-cross race in Mol after it snowed heavily.

The 31-year-old, who took the green jersey in the 2022 Tour de France, said he was disappointed after the fall in a statement shared by his team.

"Of course I am very disappointed to have to end my cyclo-cross season like this... my focus will now be on recovery and, later on, the preparation of the road season," said Van Aert, a three-time world champion in cyclo-cross.—Reuters

Toney brace sinks Ronaldo's Al Nassr in thriller

JEDDAH: Ivan Toney scored twice and provided one assist as Al-Ahli handed Cristiano Ronaldo's Al-Nassr their first Saudi Pro League defeat of the season with a 3-2 victory on Friday.

Toney put the hosts ahead with a quick-fire double, opening the scoring seven minutes into the game before adding a second 13 minutes later.

However, Al-Nassr fought back to level before half-time, with defender Abdulelah Al-Amri netting twice — first with a powerful long-range strike and then with a header.

The decisive moment came in the second half when Toney turned provider, teeing up Merih Demiral with a clever flick inside the box for the Turkish defender to slot home the winner.

The defeat snapped Al-Nassr's 11-match unbeaten run that included a record start to the league season of 10 consecutive wins that came to an end with a 2-2 draw at Al-Ettifaq last Tuesday.

Al-Nassr top the standings and are two points clear of second-placed Al-Hilal. Al-Ahli are fourth on 25 points.—Reuters

JEDDAH: Al Ahli goalkeeper Abdulrahman Al-Sanbi goes airborne to block the ball as Cristiano Ronaldo (second L) of Al Nassr looks on during their Saudi Pro League match at the King Abdullah Sports City.—Reuters

Herdman replaces Kluivert as Indonesia football coach

JAKARTA: Former Canada boss John Herdman has been named the new head coach of Indonesia, the country's football federation announced on Saturday.

Herdman replaces Patrick Kluivert after the Dutchman left by mutual consent following Indonesia's elimination from Asia's qualifiers for the World Cup in October.

The 50-year-old Englishman previously worked with New Zealand's women's team before leading the Canadian women's team to the bronze medal at the Olympic Games in 2012 and 2016.

Herdman then steered Canada's men's team to the World Cup in Qatar in 2022, the first time the country had appeared at the finals in 36 years. He most recently coached Toronto FC.

His first games in charge will be in March when Indonesia host the FIFA Series in Jakarta.—Reuters

Women's tennis does not need 'Battle of the Sexes': Swiatek

SYDNEY: Six-time Grand Slam champion Iga Swiatek on Saturday said she saw little point to the "Battle of the Sexes" match and that women's tennis has nothing more to prove.

World number one Aryna Sabalenka and Australian Nick Kyrgios faced off in a highly publicised and controversial exhibition match in Dubai a week ago.

Kyrgios won 6-3, 6-3 with Sabalenka's side of the court reduced in size by nine percent in an attempt to restrict his power and speed advantage.

It bore little resemblance to the era-defining 1973 "Battle of the Sexes" encounter between Billie Jean King and Bobby Riggs.

Back then, there was more at stake with the nascent women's professional tour, set up by King, fighting for legitimacy and prize money.

"I haven't watched because I don't watch stuff like that," world number two Swiatek said in Sydney, where she opens her season at the United Cup.

"I think for sure it attracted a lot of attention. It was entertainment, but I wouldn't say that had anything to do with social change or any important topics.

"I think the name was just the same as the one from the Billie Jean King match in '73. That's it. There were no more similarities because I feel like women's tennis stands on its own right now.

"We have so many great athletes and great stories to present, we don't necessarily need to compare to men's tennis.

"Honestly, there doesn't need to be any competition."

The Polish star, who is preparing for the Australian Open this month, the only Grand Slam she is yet to win, said the mixed-teams United Cup was a better way to celebrate men's and women's tennis.

"I think actually events like this one, United Cup, brings tennis together, and WTA fans and ATP fans can watch this event with so much excitement," she said.

"Seeing also singles players that usually don't have space to play mixed doubles together, playing these kind of matches, I think this is actually what makes our sport much more interesting and better."

Ties at the United Cup comprise one men's and one women's singles and a mixed doubles, with group winners in each host city — Perth and Sydney — advancing to the quarter-finals along with the best runners-up.

Sabalenka this week defended playing Kyrgios, saying tennis needs to "keep it fresh, keep it new, keep it fun".

"I think I would definitely do it again," she said. "I love revenge and I don't like to leave it the way it is."—AFP